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ABSTRACT

Research with beginning readers shows that children's sense of story plays a crucial role in successful reading comprehension. The purpose of this study was an extension of the speech-to-literacy process beyond the preschool years in a sample of 24 second graders with diverse levels of reading comprehension. Structural and graphic features, as well as compositional intent, were examined in written story recalls. Differences in patterns among subjects varied in relation to level of reading comprehension. Results suggest that the transition into conventional literacy is a developmental process that extends well into the primary years. Further, use of written recalls with students offers benefits as both an assessment tool and an instructional strategy for reading comprehension of narratives. (Six figures presenting students' story writing and rereadings are included; 28 references are attached. (Author)

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Literacy Research Report No. 13

DIFFERENCES IN THE WRITTEN RECALLS OF FOLKTALES AMONG ABOVE-AVERAGE, AVERAGE, AND BELOW-AVERAGE SECOND-GRADE READERS

June E. Barnhart
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July 1992

DIFFERENCES IN THE WRITTEN RECALLS OF FOLKTALES AMONG ABOVE-AVERAGE, AVERAGE, AND BELOW-AVERAGE SECOND-GRADE READERS

Abstract

Research with beginning readers shows that children's sense of story plays a crucial role in successful reading comprehension. The purpose of this study was an extension of the speech-to-literacy process beyond the preschool years in a sample of second graders with diverse levels of reading comprehension. Structural and graphic features, as well as compositional intent were examined in written story recalls. Differences in patterns among subjects varied in relation to level of reading comprehension. Results suggest that the transition into conventional literacy is a developmental process that extends well into the primary years. Further, use of written recalls with students offers benefits as both an assessment tool and an instructional strategy for reading comprehension of narratives.

Important insights into the ways in which literacy is learned and used in everyday activities have come from researchers in emergent literacy. These investigations have focused on the speech and writing of preschool children, and have included studies which examine young children's developing awareness of oral/written language differences (e.g., Clay, 1979; Holdaway, 1979; Purcell-Gates, 1988; Sulzby, 1986), as well as features of particular forms of discourse, including sense of story (Applebee, 1977). Researchers in emergent literacy consistently report observations of 4- and 5-year-old children who are not yet reading and writing conventionally, yet display knowledge of the features of written language (Barnhart, 1988, 1991; Barnhart & Sulzby, 1984; Clay, 1975; Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz, 1981; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Sulzby, 1985; Teale, 1986).

Most children grow up in a modern society where they participate in such activities as watching television, going to restaurants, going along with adults to shop, and encountering numerous experiences with written language. Through these and other everyday activities, they see writing used in signs, labels, names, grocery lists, and notes. As Cochran-Smith (1984) and others have shown, this highly contextualized writing enables children to make inferences about both the functions of writing and the relationships between visual symbols in the print and speech sounds.

But literacy requires experiences with another kind of written language, one in which meanings are independent of the situation and environment in which they occur. In such decontextualized writing, meanings are made explicit within the resources of the language itself, through syntactical and lexical features and the conventions particular to certain forms of discourse.

When children participate frequently in activities involving various forms of discourse, such as repeated encounters with a favorite nursery rhyme or storybook, they are able to abstract a frame of reference that guides their expectations and interpretations of similar texts in the future. For stories they develop schemes, or internal conceptual structures, that represent their understanding of such texts. Applebee (1977) refers to this as a "sense of story." According to Mandler and Johnson (1977) and Stein and Glenn (1979), these conceptual structures appear to be nearly fully represented in memory by the time children reach school age.

In early experiences with stories, children build up a sense of what constitutes a particular form of discourse. Research with beginning readers suggests that a well-developed set of semantic and syntactic expectations plays a crucial role in successful reading. For example, research by Brown (1977) shows that the extent of a child's sense of story affects comprehension and ease in reading and listening to stories, as well as affecting the ability to retell and create stories. Along these lines, recent research by Barnhart (1990) showed that the story retellings of second-grade children paralleled their level of reading comprehension. As children struggle with their developing reading skills and

strategies, they can draw on the clues provided by the text-forming component of meaning, as well as on those clues that come from their knowledge of syntax and semantics. Further, progress in literacy requires experiences and knowledge of the language of written narrative, as children learn many of the major differences between oral and written language. As they learn the appropriate conventions for decontextualizing text, they come to listen to and produce written narratives whereby the language itself plays a prominent role in carrying the meaning. To date, a considerable amount of work has focused on preschool children's growth in oral and written language, and the tie between their acquisition of story structure. The present study had its roots in the work that has centered on young children prior to entry into formal reading instruction in school. To this end, this study was an examination of the speech-to-literacy process beyond the preschool years in a sample of second-grade children who were heterogeneous with regard to conventional reading comprehension. Further, it was an extension of the research by Barnhart (1990) that used story retelling as a tool to examine children's ability to reconstruct meaning. In particular, the goal of the present study was to examine structural and graphic differences in the written productions of story recalls, as well as compositional intent in relation to conventional reading comprehension.

Method

Subjects

The data base for the present study was 24 children (14 boys, 10 girls) within a second-grade classroom in a public school located in a suburb of Chicago. At the start of the study in September, the mean age of subjects was 7 years, 8 months (range = 6-11 to 9-1 in September). Based on the results of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, Level B, Form 1 (Gates & MacGinitie, 1978), the classroom teacher had formed three groups for purposes of reading instruction. There were 6 children (5 girls, 1 boy) in the Above- Grade Group, 9 children (2 girls, 7 boys) in the Grade-Level Group, and 9 children (3 girls, 6 boys) in the Below-Grade Group. The mean grade equivalent

Reading Comprehension scores for each group were 3.66 (range = 3.0-4.5), 1.78 (range = 1.7-2.0), and 1.06 (range = 0-1.4), respectively. An analysis of variance showed statistically significant differences among groups in the Comprehension raw scores ($F[1,22] = 98.59$, $p < .0001$). Post hoc t tests showed all three paired comparisons to be statistically significant ($p < .0001$).

Materials

Seven folktales were selected from a collection titled, The Big Book of Classic Fairy Stories (Craik, 1987) and included the following stories, read in this order: "The Frog-Prince," "The Wolf and the Seven Young Goslings," "The Prince With the Nose," "The Six Swans," "The Fisherman and His Wife," "The Twelve Dancing Princesses," and "One Eye, Two Eyes, Three Eyes." Prior to the start of the study, a random number table was used by the researcher to determine this order, and these particular folktales were selected because of the likelihood that they would be unfamiliar to these subjects.

Design and Procedure

Using techniques described in King (1988) and King and Rentel (1982), subjects listened to their teacher read one of the seven folktales per week in a group setting. Immediately following the reading, subjects were individually interviewed, and asked to write the story for someone not present. Specific directions given to each subject were as follows: "I know that Ms. (teacher's name) just read you a great story (pause). Have you ever heard that story before? (pause) Well, I wasn't there to hear that great story, so I want you to write the story for me. Be sure to include everything in the story." Immediately following the writing, subjects were asked to read their stories twice in order to obtain a measure of stability of story across the readings.

Data Analyses

Analyses were based on detailed transcriptions for each subject, and two trained raters independently scored each subject's written production. Using Propp's (1968) identification of fixed

elements in folktales, the structure of the written recalls was analyzed. In a study of 100 fairytales, Propp (1968) demonstrated that in traditional fairytales there is an invariant sequence of functions. Overall, there are 31 functions which are sequences of action and reaction. Using this scheme in the present study, the number, type, and order of functions in subjects' written recalls were analyzed. Finally, subjects' sense of story structure, as well as the graphic form(s) of writing used and the nature of the readings were examined using the scheme described by Sulzby, Barnhart, and Hieshima (1989).

Results

None of the subjects responded positively when asked if they had ever heard the story before, confirming the initial assumption that the seven folktales were unfamiliar to these subjects. Figures 1 through 6 are photocopy reductions of subjects' written recalls, with their readings of these productions typed at the bottom. These examples are representative of productions of subjects in each group and serve to illustrate the different patterns among groups. Subjects' names in these examples have been replaced with alternate names in order to maintain their privacy.

Above-Grade Group

Overall, the written recalls of the six subjects in the Above-Grade Group were homogeneous, with little variation in terms of their complexity, clarity, and cohesive organization. The stories were very detailed and clearly told the original folktales. Their written recalls were unambiguous with cohesion established through a mix of reference and lexical devices. Their sense of story was relatively mature and included the use of past tense, formal beginnings, and dialogue. Story-like plot structure was present, causal relationships were generally clear, and a sense of an ending was evident. Their ability to use the language of the story (which is part of the sense of story) was especially evident.

Brandy's written recall is presented in Figure 1, and is representative of subjects in the Above-Grade Group. Her story was very lengthy, with deep, elaborate levels of content organization. Brandy wrote the story rapidly and deliberately, with very focused attention to the task. As she wrote, she moved her lips inaudibly and periodically paused to look back and read what she had already written. At various times during this process, she edited her writing. Matching her voice to the print, both of her readings of her written production were stable. Her reading was smooth and fluent, with occasional self-corrections. Using primarily conventional spelling with occasional full invented spelling, her written recall contained several examples of written language features, including decontextualized text and detailed punctuation to guide the reader. Her writing contained several examples of literary syntax, such as "The fisherman's wife was not pleased yet;" "...ask him if I shall be pope;" "...if I would be like god."

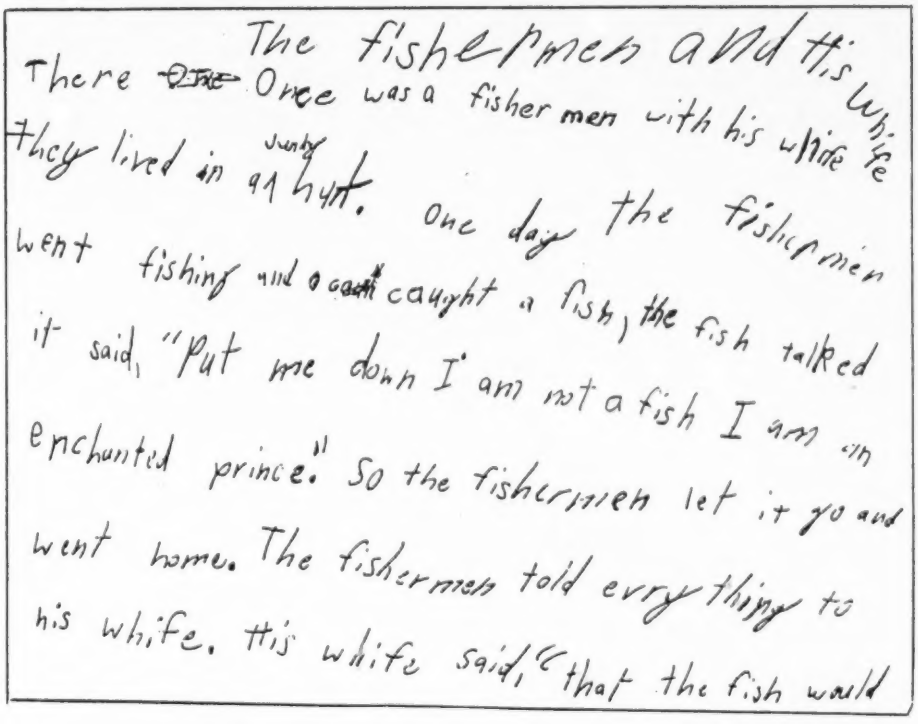
Grade-Level Group

Like the stories of subjects in the Above-Grade Group, the written recalls of the nine subjects in the Grade-Level Group were also relatively homogeneous with regard to the degree of detail and accuracy of the original folktale. However, the nature of this homogeneity centered on written stories that involved few details and is thus in sharp contrast to the more complex productions of subjects in the Above-Grade Group. Not only were the written stories of subjects in the Grade Level Group shorter and less detailed, containing fewer functions, but the stories were highly inaccurate in comparison with the original folktale. Overall, subjects in the Grade-Level Group showed less competence in storywriting than subjects in the Above Grade Group. Their text was more ambiguous and lacked the complexity and diversity of syntax of the story language observed in the recalls of subjects in the Above-Grade Group.

Figure 2 presents Steve's written recall, and is representative of those by subjects in the Grade-Level Group.

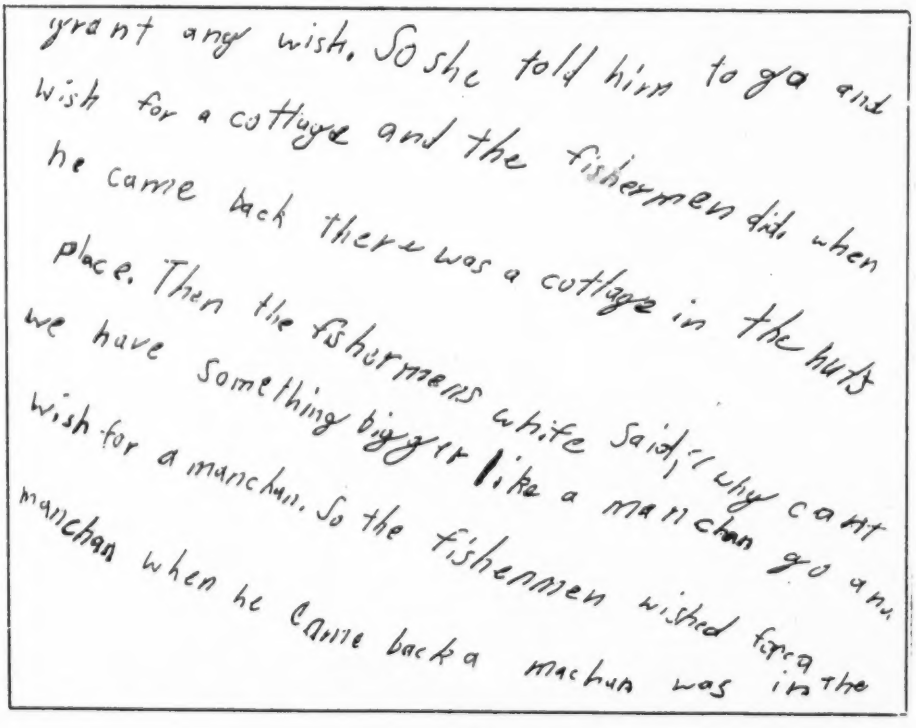
Figure 1. Brandy's Storywriting and Rereading of The Fisherman and His Wife

(Above-Grade Group)



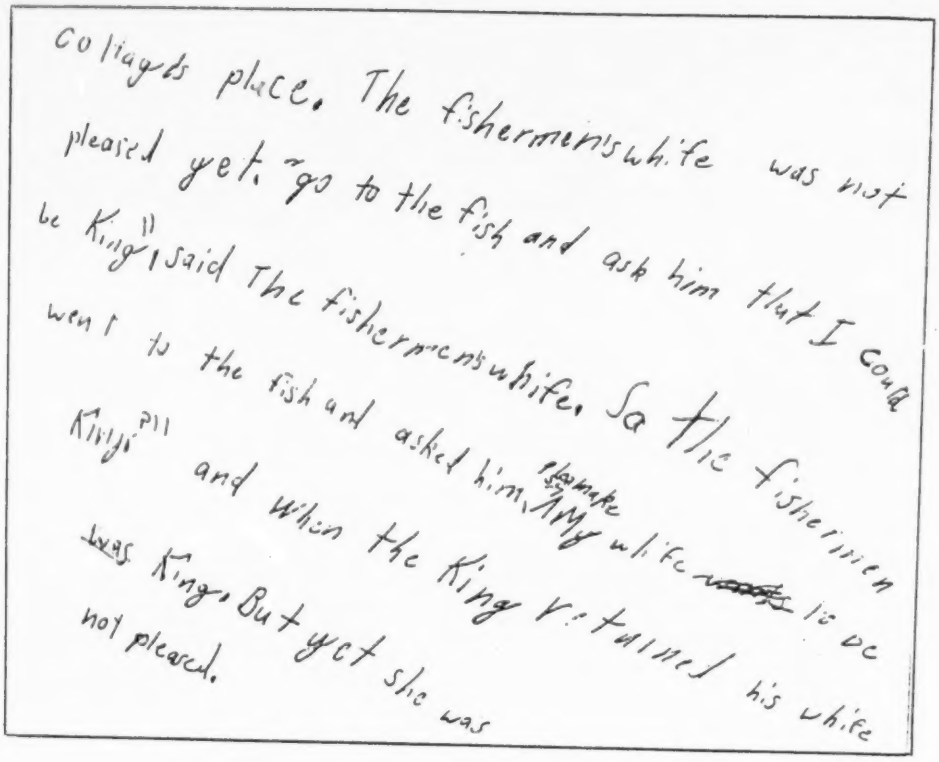
The fishermen and his whife
There ~~Once~~ Once was a fisher men with his whife
they lived in a hunt. one day the fishermen
went fishing and caught a fish, the fish talked
it said, "Put me down I am not a fish I am an
enchanted prince." So the fishermen let it go and
went home. The fishermen told every thing to
his whife. his whife said, "that the fish would

(page 1)



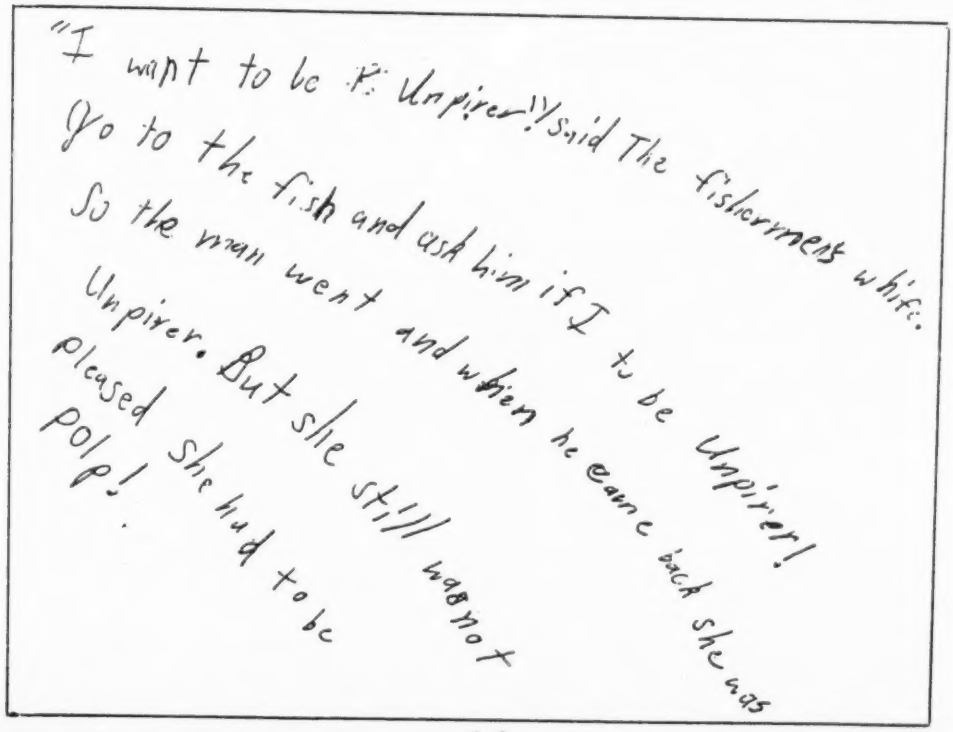
grant any wish. So she told him to go and
wish for a cottage and the fishermen did. when
he came back there was a cottage in the hut's
place. Then the fishermens whife said, "why can't
we have something bigger like a manchan go and
wish for a manchan. So the fishermen wished for a
manchan when he came back a machan was in the

(page 2)



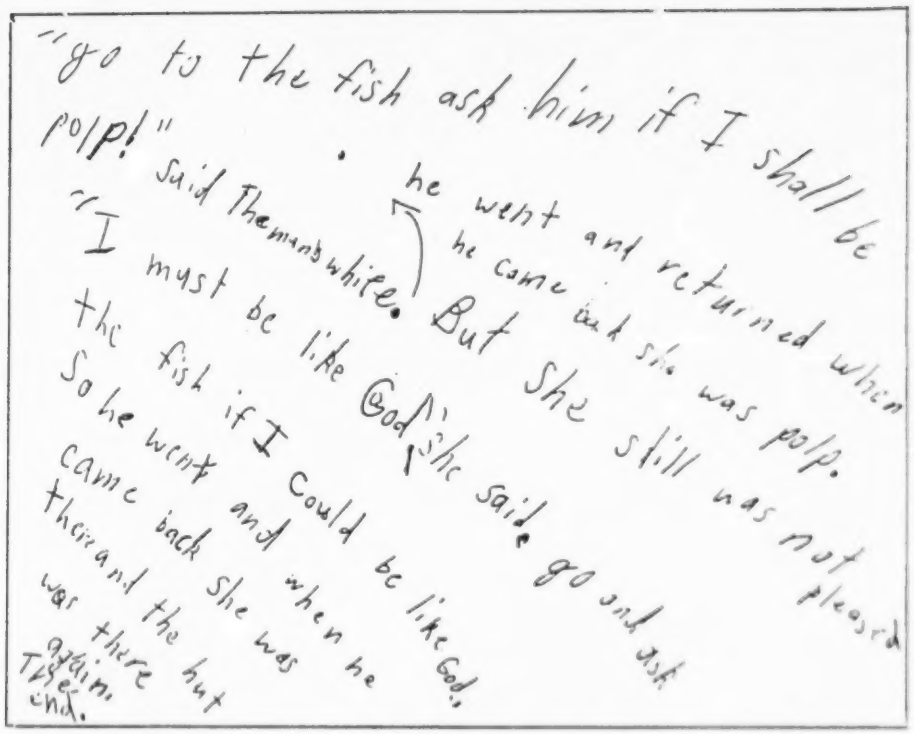
coliagds place. The fishermens wife was not
pleased yet. "go to the fish and ask him that I could
be King" I said The fishermens wife. So the fisherman
went to the fish and asked him, "My wife ~~wants~~ to be
King." and when the King returned his wife
was King. But yet she was
not pleased.

(page 3)



"I want to be a Umpire!" said The fishermens wife.
Go to the fish and ask him if I to be Umpire!
So the man went and when he came back she was
Umpire. But she still was not
pleased She had to be
pop!

(page 4)


"go to the fish ask him if I shall be pope!"
he went and returned when he came back she was pope.
said the man's wife. But she still was not pleased
"I must be like God." she said go and ask the fish if I could be like God.
So he went and when he came back she was there and the hut was there again.
The end.

(page 5)

Rereading: The Fisherman and His Wife. There once was a fisherman with his wife. They lived in a junky hut. One day the fisherman went fishing and caught a fish. The fish talked. It said, "Put me down. I am not a fish. I am (pause) a enchanted prince." So the fisherman let it go and went home. The fisherman told everything to his wife. His wife said that the fish would bring any wish so she told him to go and wish for a cottage and the fisherman did. When he came back there was a cottage in the hut's place. Then the fisherman's wife said, "Why can't (pause) we have something bigger like a mansion. Go and wish for mansion." So the fisherman wished for a mansion. When the, when he came back a mansion was in the cottage's place. The fisherman, the fisherman's wife was not pleased yet. "Go to the fish and ask that I could be king," said the fisherman's wife. So the fisherman went to the fish and asked him "Please make my wife to be (pause) to be (pause) king." But yet she was not pleased. "I want to be umpire" (text: emperor). So the man went and when he came back, she was umpire (text: emperor). But she still was not pleased. She had to be pope. "Go to the fish and ask him if I shall be pope," said the fisherman, said the man's wife. He went and returned when he came back she was pope. But she still was not (pause) pleased (pause) pleased (pause). "I must be like god," she said. "Go and ask the fish if I could be like god." So he went and when he came back, she was there and the hut was there again. The end.

According to Hasan (1984), all stories must have three elements: an initiating event, a sequent event, and a final event. Steve's story contains two of these obligatory elements of a story: an initiating event (including a character) and a final event. He has also included the optional placement (or setting) when he writes "...lived in a castle." What is missing is the third obligatory story element: the final event(s).

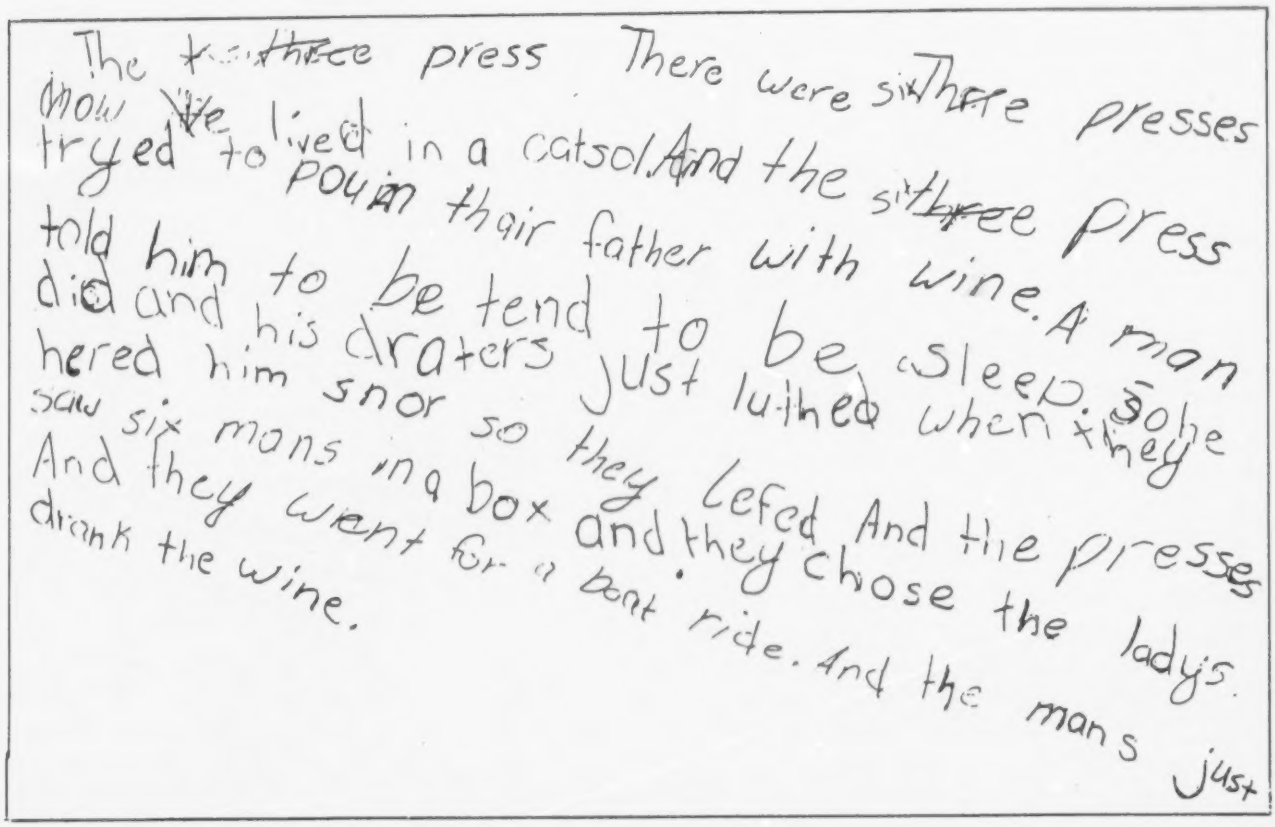
A closer look, however, at the details or the content of the two elements that Steve did include reveals that while these elements are present, they are not accurate with the original folktale. Steve begins his recall by writing "There were six princesses..." while the original folktale contains 12 princesses, and the title of the folktale includes the number 12. He includes a final event ("And the mans just drank the wine"), yet the original folktale ends with an event that is traditional to folktales; i.e., a wedding between the soldier and one of the princesses. Early in the original story, the soldier is advised NOT to drink the wine; however, Steve reverses this event, and then chooses to make it the final event in his written recall.

Like Brandy, Steve approached the task with focused attention, moving his lips inaudibly as he wrote. Periodically, he looked back at what he had written, edited, and continued writing. His eyes tracked the print as he read his written production, and his two readings were stable, as he read his story smoothly with several self-corrections. Like most of the other subjects in the Grade-Level Group, Steve's writing contained more full invented spelling and less conventional spelling than subjects in the Above-Grade Group.

Below-Grade Group

As a whole, the nine subjects in the Below-Grade Group consistently produced written recalls that lacked clarity, cohesiveness, and were markedly less complex than those by subjects in the Above-Grade Level and Grade-Level Groups. This homogeneity with regard to structure was accompanied, however, by considerable diversity in writing forms. In other words, the performance of subjects in

Figure 2. Steve's Storywriting and Rereading of The Twelve Dancing Princesses (Grade- Level Group)


The ~~twelve~~ press There were six~~There~~ presses
now ~~We~~ lived in a catsol. And the six~~three~~ press
tryed to poyin their father with wine. A man
told him to be tend to be asleep. So he
did and his draters just luthed when they
hered him snor so they lefed. And the presses
saw six mans in a box and they chose the ladys.
And they went for a bot ride. And the mans just
drank the wine.

Rereading: The Six Princesses. There were six princesses. They lived in a castle and the six princesses tried to poison their father with wine a man told him to be, to betend (text: pretend) to be asleep so he did and his daughters just laughed when they heard him snore so they left and the princesses saw six mans and a box and they chose the ladies and they went for a boat ride and the mans just drank the wine.

the Below-Grade Group on this task showed little variance with regard to their low level understanding of underlying story structure; however, there was considerable diversity in the graphic forms (or writing systems) used to create these written productions. Four subjects from the Below-Grade Group have been selected to illustrate the various patterns among children in this Group.

Orson's written recall is presented in Figure 3. After being presented with the directions for the task, Orson started writing immediately and worked with very focused attention. His written production contained lines of print that were primarily strings of letters, and often were not grouped into graphic units. He included conventional spelling of some simple words (e.g., THE, TO, SHE, HE, UP, FROG), and some beginning invented spelling (e.g., "princess" = PGLACKS; "were" = WIHCK) was scattered throughout his written production. As Orson wrote, he whispered a few letter names, and although he did some editing while writing, the nature of his editing involved his concern for writing the correct letter or correct letter formation (e.g., he changed H to K several times). When Orson read his written recall, he looked at the examiner and only occasionally glanced down at the page. The two readings were not stable, with Orson admitting "I forgot what else is in the story...I mean what I said before...I can't remember what I said before." His story lacked interrelated chains of reference and events, containing only the initiating event (including the optional setting), with the middle and end of the story undeveloped.

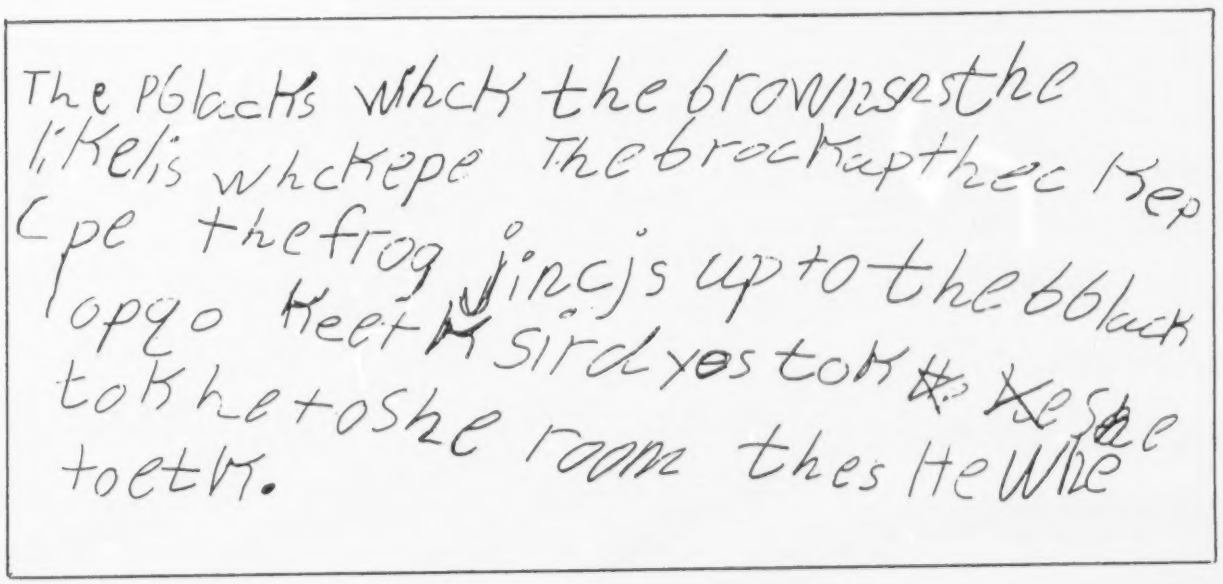
The stories written by Sandy (Figure 4) and Kathy (Figure 5) are also examples of written recalls from subjects in the Below-Grade Group. Their recalls also contained lines of print but unlike Orson, they predominantly used conventional spelling to write simple, monosyllabic words that were generally separated by spaces. There was some scattered use of full invented spelling in each of their stories, and this invented spelling was stable within each story (e.g., in Sandy's production "told" = TID; in Kathy's production "golden" = GOOLDIN, and "could" = COOD). Like Orson's, their sense of story was considerably less mature than Steve's or Brandy's. Their written recalls lacked

any story-like plot structure, causal relationships, and a sense of an ending. Kathy's written recall is syntactically immature, with periods used to separate clauses. She has further simplified her production by using the numerals 1, 2, and 3 rather than writing the words for these numerals. Both Sandy and Kathy have ignored the use of written conventions, omitting words, and showing an inability to cope with the logic of the folktale. Yet for Sandy and Kathy, both of their readings of their writing were stable.

While both Sandy and Kathy show considerable limitations in the development of their sense of story, some knowledge of literacy syntax is evident. For example, Kathy began writing the story and then told the examiner, "I think that's the title." Yet, her reading of her written production did not include the title. Sandy concluded her story with the traditional story-like ending, "the end," and both of her readings included this text.

Finally, Figure 6 shows the written recall by Sam and serves to underscore the marked range in written productions (i.e., writing systems) among subjects in the Below- Grade Group. As he created the recall of the folktale, Sam talked to the examiner, discussing not only what he was putting on paper, but also talking about what he hoped would be served for lunch that day. He began his story by telling the examiner, "Oh boy, this was a good story. I'm gonna make it real good." He proceeded to produce two pages of drawings on both sides of the paper. His story was stable across both readings as he looked at the examiner and at his drawings, while relating the events in each picture. His readings, however, were carried out differently than the order in which he had produced the original drawings. More specifically, the order of pages he read was exactly the reverse from the order in which he had originally drawn his pictures. Sam read his story with excitement and animation, looking primarily at the examiner as he read and occasionally glancing at the paper.

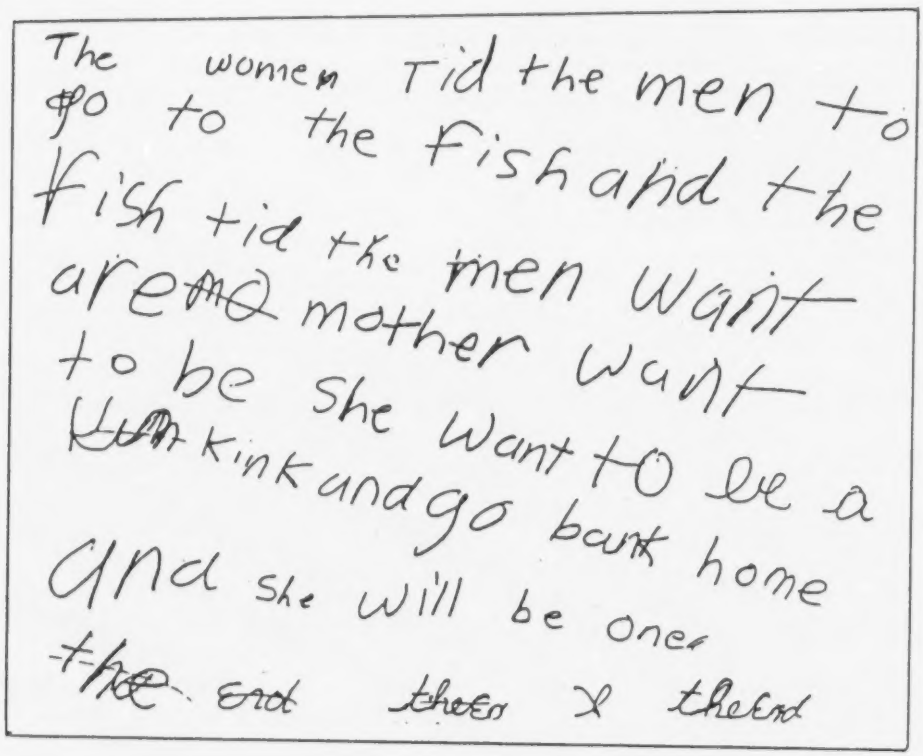
Figure 3. Orson's Storywriting and Rereading of The Frog Prince (Below-Grade Group)



1st Rereading: The princes were the best princes the littlest one always went to the well and flipped her coin and then she saw a frog when it went into the (pause) water (pause) the frog came out (pause) and what are you crying for? (pause) I lost my coin in the water. What will you give me if I go down and get the coin? (pause) My clothes, necklace, um, shoes (child looks around the room), my pencil, chair, desk, (pause) coat (pause) anything. Only if you let me eat and sleep in your room.

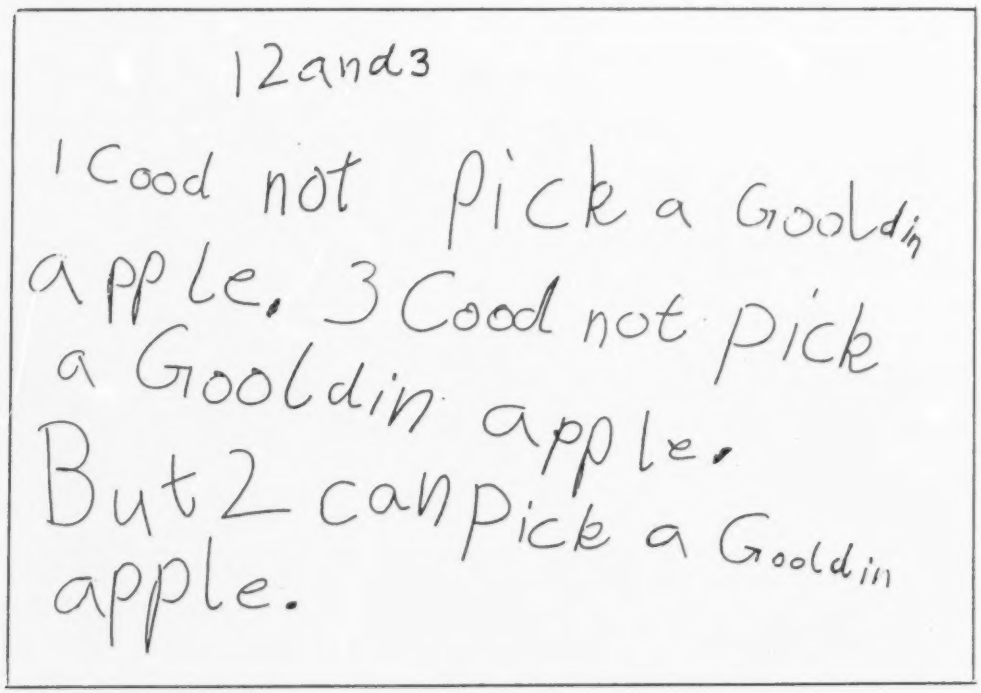
2nd Rereading: The princesses were there. The littlest one went to the (pause) water and played there with her dime. (pause) She lost her money one day and (pause) she cried and cried and (pause) she wanted her dime back. "Then what are you crying for?" "I lost my money I think you have my dime" (pause) "Will you give it back to me?" I forgot what else is in the story (pause) I mean, what I said before (pause, as child looks at examiner). I can't remember what I said before.

Figure 4. Sandy's Storywriting and Rereading of The Fisherman and His Wife (Below-Grade Group)


The women Tid the men to
go to the fish and the
fish tid the men what
are mother want
to be she want to be a
kink and go back home
and she will be one
end the end

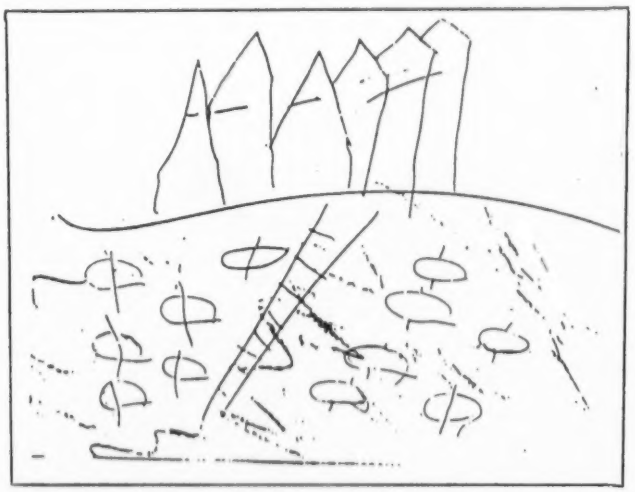
Rereading: The woman told the man (pause) the (pause) man to go to the fish and the fish told the man what are (pause) what your mother want to be. She wants to be a king and go back home and she will be one. The end.

Figure 5. Kathy's Storywriting and Rereading of <u>One Eye, Two Eyes, Three Eyes</u> (Below-Grade Group)

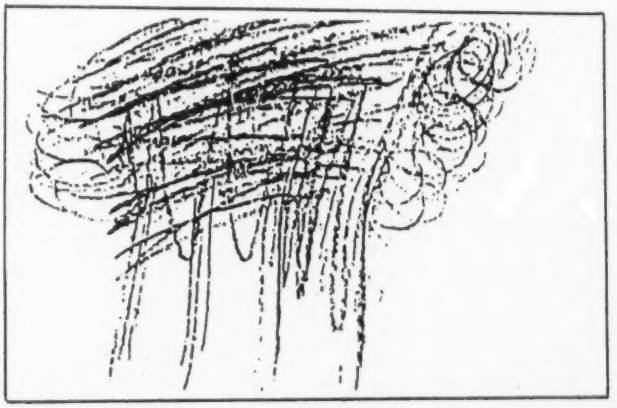


<u>Rereading</u>: One could not pick a yellow apple. Three could not pick a golden apple, but two (pause) can pick a golden apple.

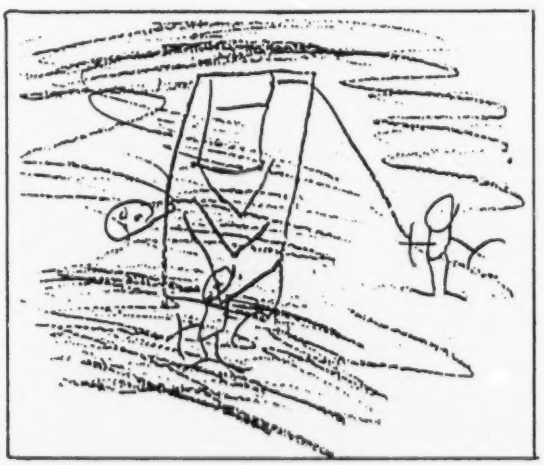
Figure 6. Sam's Storywriting and Rereading of The Twelve Dancing Princesses (Below-Grade Group)



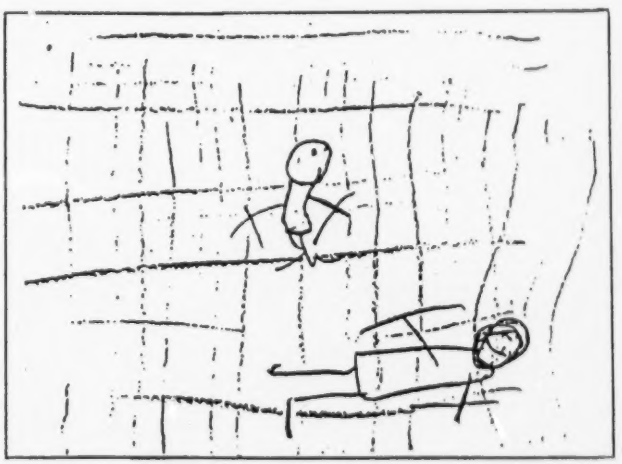
Rereading: Written as page 4: The princesses go through the diamond, the different colored lights. A man got his head chopped off.



Written a page 2: And then he had a invisible coat which made him invisible in front of the princesses through the (pause) crystal, diamond, gold, and silver trees.



Written as page 1:
And they arried at the palace.



Written as page 3: So then a man came with a (pause) and the girl looked in at him, but he didn't drink it he had a sponge.

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Discussion

The present study uncovered variations in the patterns of written language development of children in the primary grades. Further, these differential patterns among children varied in relation to their level of reading comprehension. These differences among groups were observed not only in the graphic forms used to produce the written recalls, but also in their underlying understanding of the characteristics of written narratives.

Consistent with previous research with kindergartners (e.g., Barnhart, 1988; Sulzby, Barnhart, & Hieshima, 1989), results of the present study support the suggestion that literacy development follows a complex path. Further, these results support previous research (Michaels & Collins, 1984; Michaels & Cook-Gumperz, 1979) suggesting that children's spoken discourse styles hold important consequences for their literacy acquisition. We have now come to realize that growth in literacy during the preschool years is developmental, and data reported here demonstrate that children's transition into conventional reading and writing is a dynamic process that extends well into the primary years. As formal reading instruction in school begins, Sulzby (1990) urges that we must build on what children already understand. The present research suggests that we need to rethink our assumptions about the nature of children's transition into conventional literacy. Assuming that the mere exposure to formal reading instruction in school results in children's adoption of conventional reading and writing behaviors ignores the developmental nature of the language-learning process that continues beyond the preschool years.

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